Dossier: Spanish Bases and Operation Nickel Grass (1973)

This dossier compiles declassified U.S. diplomatic cables and historical context about whether American bases in Spain — Torrejón and Morón — were used to support Operation Nickel Grass, the October 1973 airlift of military supplies to Israel during the Yom Kippur War.

Key Findings

1. **No direct evidence of base use:** Declassified State Department cables (October 1973) show Spain protested the idea of U.S. overflight or base use for resupplying a belligerent. The U.S. reassured Spain that airlift flights remained over international waters and did not land in Spain.
2. **Diplomatic sensitivity:** Spain's Foreign Ministry explicitly stated that base agreements did not authorize use of Spanish bases for such operations. This was linked to Spain's strategy of maintaining good relations with Arab states and avoiding involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict.
3. **Possible covert tolerance:** While official documentation shows a refusal, historians note that limited or tacit cooperation cannot be ruled out — e.g., occasional emergency landings or overflights not publicized — but there is no confirmed record of this.

Primary Source Excerpts

US Embassy Madrid Cable (October 1973):
"The Foreign Ministry expressed concern over reports that American transport aircraft might be using Spanish bases or overflying Spain en route to Israel. Embassy confirmed that all flights had been kept over international waters and that base use was not involved." (Wikileaks, 1973MADRID06472_b)
Spanish Position:
"Use of bases in Spain for Mideast operations lies outside the authorization of the bilateral base agreement. Spain cannot be involved in resupplying a belligerent power." (Summary of Foreign Minister discussions, October 1973)

Conclusion

Available evidence strongly suggests that Torrejón and Morón were not officially used in Operation Nickel Grass. Spain likely forced the U.S. to reroute or rely on Azores, Sicily, and other staging points. While covert assistance cannot be fully ruled out, there is no documented proof of Spanish base involvement.